PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 22 Number 11 October 2025

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, October 19, 2025, 6.00AM: Narsapur Reserve Forest, Medak Dist. Meeting Point(s): Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 05:00AM; Opp Dindigul Air Force Station, 05:50AM. Coordinator(s): Gurukumar KR (Mobile: 96188-27407)

Located in Medak District, Narsapur Forest is about 50 km from Hyderabad and its range is spread over 3500 hectares. The park has a diverse range of flora and wildlife, and it has various natural rock formations and ponds, is a dry deciduous forest known for several medicinal plants. The highlight of the forest is a cosy lake tucked away in the heart of it where we can just sit by to admire the serenity and tranquillity of the place by observing waterfowl. Watch for Jerdon's Nightjar, Jerdon's Leafbird, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker etc. Also, watch out for winter migrants as the season is around.

FIELD TRIP-2: To be decided. Details will be announced on the Deccan Birders email and WhatsApp groups.

Both trips will be half-day trips, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

THE BEAUTY OF BIRDS IN THE MONSOON
Trip Report: Tadoba National Park, August 17-20, 2025

Text & Photos: N Shiva Kumar

A view inside Tadoba National Park

Most people avoid visiting National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries during the monsoon, and understandably so, as the core zones of the jungles are closed to visitors. Few, however, realise that the buffer zones remain open. Knowing this, I set my sights on Tadoba National Park in Chandrapur district, Maharashtra. The 400km drive from Hyderabad was an open-road invitation I couldn't resist, rain or no rain. If the skies decided to drench me during a safari, so be it. I was armed with my container of cameras, and obviously there was a rain coat and umbrella to keep out that intermittent drizzle.

When the first monsoon clouds rolled over Tadoba, the forest seemed to exhale. The brittle, sun-baked browns of summer melted into an endless expanse of greens. Once-dry *nullahs* brimmed with pools of fresh rainwater, Sal and Teak leaves dripped with diamond-like droplets, and the very air pulsed with the intoxicating scent of wet earth. The transformation was so dramatic, so complete, it felt as though the land itself had been reborn and only shades of lush greens were visible. In this rebirth, it is the birds that take centre stage. The monsoon in Tadoba is not only the realm of prowling Tigers or the watchful eyes of Sambar and Chital, it is the season when feathers outshine fur, when the forest becomes an open-air amphitheatre for a spectacular avian performance.

A massive male Tiger, up close

Birds greet the rains with an infectious energy, their joy both audible and visible. For many, this is the season of courtship and breeding, so their plumage glows richer, their calls more insistent, as if they too cannot resist the romance in the air. The Indian Pitta, secretive for most of the year, suddenly appears on the damp forest floor, its emerald, sapphire, and crimson plumage gleaming like scattered jewels. With its sweet, rhythmic call, the Pitta is the herald of the rains, its colours mirroring the fresh monsoon palette of the forest.

Indian Peafowl

Peacocks, those timeless emblems of grace, seem to come alive like never before. In clearings and along misty forest tracks, they unfurl their celestial fans, shimmering with iridescent blues and greens, and dance with a regal flamboyance. The patter of rain on leaves becomes the percussion to their performance, and the wild mango trees stand witness as they call out in echoing notes that carry far into the drenched canopy.

By the swollen streams, Kingfishers claim their own spotlight. The Common, White-throated, and Pied varieties perch like ornaments against the grey drizzle, their plumage electrifying in its brightness. Then, in a flash of movement, they dive with surgical precision, re-emerging with a fish that glistens briefly before disappearing down a slender throat. Drongos, Bulbuls, and Ioras fill the misty mornings with a cheerful racket, their voices rising above the steady drizzle, while Barbets and Cuckoos keep up a patient, rhythmic chorus. If that was not enough, the Racket-tailed Drongo goes about strutting its long tail feathers just like the Paradise-flycatchers.

Asian Openbill

Tadoba's quieter wetland pockets, Kolsa, Telia, and other rain-fed meadows, become sanctuaries for monsoon-loving waterbirds. Painted Storks and Openbill Storks wade elegantly through the shallows, while Indian Spot-billed Ducks paddle between reeds heavy with rain.

Indian Thick-knee

Among the grasses, almost invisible until they move, stand the Indian Thick-knees, their large eyes shining with alertness. In the tangles of rain-drenched undergrowth, Paradise-flycatchers flit past, the white-tailed males streaming long ribbons of grace through the air. Red-wattled Lapwings patrol the wet ground with their chicks, fussing over them like attentive teachers. An occasional Purple Heron and Grey Heron play statue with angled neckline to catch lurking fish at their feet.

Red-wattled Lapwing juvenile

Even the raptors, those masters of stillness, seem changed by the season. The Crested Serpent Eagle and the Changeable Hawk Eagle spread their wings wide to dry in brief moments of sun, perched like living sculptures against storm-grey skies. With sudden sweeps over the meadows, they remind the forest that beauty and power are often found in the same frame. My own most unforgettable sighting was of a young Fish Eagle, fresh in its independence, wheeling effortlessly above the rain-silvered landscape and testing perches along the lake's edge, each movement a study in strength and freedom. Alas, they are endangered and their numbers are dwindling.

Grey-headed Fish Eagle juvenile

For those willing to brave Tadoba during what many call the 'off-season', the rewards are unmatched. Safaris in the monsoon are unhurried affairs; the forest is quieter, the mist clings low to the ground, and the grass is heavy with dew. The soundtrack is a blend of rain tapping leaves, distant peacock calls, and the liquid notes of the Orange-Headed Thrush or the sudden, insistent cry of the Brain Fever bird.

Black-hooded Oriole

In these months, birds become the soul of Tadoba's wilderness. Some dazzle, like the Black-hooded Oriole, a golden flame against the greens, while others charm with their understated elegance, relying not on colour but on voice to make themselves known. Together, they turn the monsoon forest into a living, breathing orchestra, a celebration of resilience, courtship, survival, and sheer, unrestrained joy. Seeing five Tigers was of course a bonus but in the subdued light conditions under the cloudy sky photography was a big challenge with long lenses – I sighted 119 bird species but managed to click only a few of them.

An interesting signboard at Tadoba

As you leave Tadoba in the rains, you carry with you not just photographs but memories of a forest alive with wings, a place where every drop of rain seems to add a note to a song that has been sung for centuries. In the monsoon, Tadoba does not merely host birds. It becomes them.

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	11	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*
2	Cotton Pygmy-goose	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	12	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*
3	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	13	Green Imperial Pigeon	*Ducula aenea*
4	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	14	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*
5	Red Spurfowl	*Galloperdix spadicea*	15	Pied Cuckoo	*Clamator jacobinus*
6	Grey Junglefowl	*Gallus sonneratii*	16	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*
7	Jungle Bush Quail	*Perdicula asiatica*	17	Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo	*Surniculus dicruroides*
8	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	18	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*
9	Red Collared Dove	*Streptopelia tranquebarica*	19	Indian Cuckoo	*Cuculus micropterus*
10	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	20	Common Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
21	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	71	Indian Pitta	*Pitta brachyura*
22	Crested Treeswift	*Hemiprocne coronata*	72	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
23	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	73	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*
24	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	74	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*
25	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	75	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
26	Indian Thick-knee	*Burhinus indicus*	76	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
27	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	77	Spot-breasted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*
28	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	78	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
29	Greater Painted-snipe	*Rostratula benghalensis*	79	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*
30	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	80	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus paradiseus*
31	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	81	Black-naped Monarch	*Hypothymis azurea*
32	Barred Buttonquail	*Turnix suscitator*	82	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
33	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	83	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
34	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	84	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
35	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	85	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
36	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	86	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*
37	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	87	Asian Tit	*Parus cinereus*
38	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	88	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
39	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	89	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
40	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	90	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
41	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	91	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
42	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	92	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
43	Cinnamon Bittern	*Botaurus cinnamomeus*	93	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*
44	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	94	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
45	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola greyii*	95	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
46	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Ardea coromanda*	96	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
47	Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	97	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
48	grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	98	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
49	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	99	Tawny-bellied Babbler	*Dumetia hyperythra*
50	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	100	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*
51	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	101	Indian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
52	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	102	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
53	Shikra	*Tachyspiza badia*	103	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
54	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	*Icthyophaga ichthyaetus*	104	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
55	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*	105	Orange-headed Thrush	*Geokichla citrina*
56	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	106	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
57	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	107	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
58	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	108	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
59	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*	109	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
60	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	110	Brown Rock Chat	*Oenanthe fusca*
61	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	111	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
62	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	112	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
63	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	113	Jerdon's Leafbird	*Chloropsis jerdoni*
64	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	114	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
65	Brown-headed Barbet	*Psilopogon zeylanicus*	115	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
66	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Leiopicus mahrattensis*	116	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
67	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*	117	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
68	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*	118	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
69	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	119	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*
70	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*			

* * *

Trip Report: Keesara, September 07, 2025

Surekha Aitabathula

A view of the Keesara quarries (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

It was one fine beautiful morning that took around fifteen of us to Keesaragutta Range, hoping for a good bird outing. Although the monsoon was overactive in the past week, the weather held to allow us to sight over 40 species!

Our trip coordinator, Gowthama, led us efficiently on a very wide circular pathway surrounding the rampantly quarried rocky hillocks. We covered good ground this way, finding many wonderful creatures and plants besides the birds.

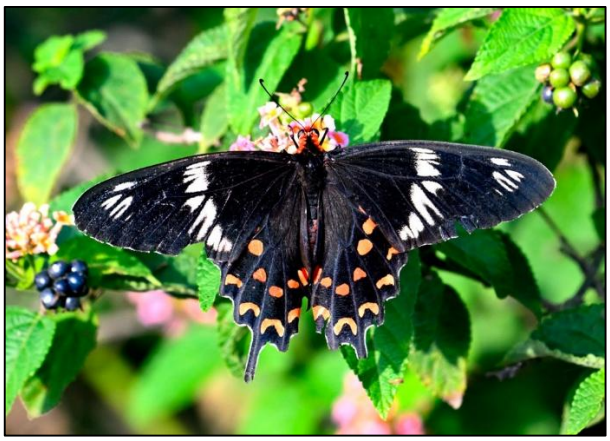
Rainwater had collected in between this illegally quarried stone. Several large troughs of rainwater were a pleasant sight – a saving grace. That said, it was sad to see the ugly result of stone quarrying. My first thought was how beautiful the rockies would have looked when untouched. Now they look like a desolate apology to the Grand Canyon with man-carved hillocks. *Homo sapiens* the plunderer never rests till he destroys nature.

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Our group was first greeted by Grey Francolin calls. Green Bee-eaters and Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks were foraging boldly right ahead of us. It is a great feeling for every birder when the birds do not fly away on our approach. It feels like they trust us not to harm them. However, birders also know deep down that we must never approach birds right up front – we must approach in an arc, either to the left or the right, so as to not disturb them. One of the first rules of birding I learnt.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Spot-billed Ducks, Glossy Ibis, Dusky Crag Martin and Asian Palm Swift flew by making all of us crane our necks and train our binoculars to watch them fly by, displaying clearly their wing shapes to us against a not-so-blue sky.



Crimson Rose (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Common Rose as well as Crimson Rose butterflies were flitting across, sometimes showing their wings and sometimes alighting softly on flowers.

Common Sopubia (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Rains had made way for many wild flowers. One such gorgeous flower was the Common Sopubia (*Parasopubia delphinifolia*). It is a small pristine white flower with a sudden purple patch within that immediately arrests your attention. *Sopubia* is a herb known to grow around laterite hillocks, moist grasslands and swamps, and is said to have medicinal properties, useful in healing sores.

Common Wireweed (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Common Wireweed (*Sida acuta*) was a pretty discovery that sprouted lovely mustard flowers. Google describes this weed as an ethno-medicinal plant with traditional uses for malaria, fever, ulcers, wounds and elephantiasis.

Gomphrena celosioides was another interesting weed we spotted. The flowers are a delicate whitish to pink coloured with a papery look and feel.

Gomphrena celosioides (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

It also goes without saying these days that *Lantana camara* was all pervasive here, and there were many other flowers all around.

Tropical Speedwell *Evolvulus alsinoides*
(Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

White-browed Wagtail meeting (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

The White-browed Wagtail is always a pleasure to watch. A dynamic bird whose tail continuously goes up and down alternately showing flashes of white and black. And a brow that looks like it was perfectly set in a beauty parlour!

The Guest of Honour today was the Oriental Honey Buzzard, giving us a grandstand view right on top of the canopy. It sat still and looked proud and intense as only the raptors can. As it took flight, we were in awe of the majestic wing span that engineers the aerodynamics of a bird flight. No birder worth his salt can ever have enough of raptor take offs.

Oriental Honey-buzzard juvenile (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

The group in action (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

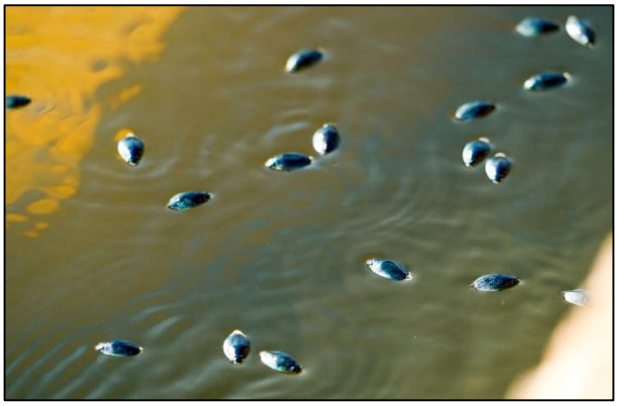
Baya Weavers kept us entertained for a while, perching quite visibly to our utter delight.

Baya Weaver (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Common Iora (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Common Iora and Indian Robin staged an opera with the accompaniment of Tailorbirds, Prinias and Lapwings, all for our listening pleasure.

Ashy Prinia (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)



Whirligig Beetles (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Another exciting new-found species for me was the Whirligig Beetles. These are water beetles that swim on the surface of the water if undisturbed, and underwater when threatened. They get their name from their habit of swimming rapidly in circles when alarmed. They are ellipsoid in shape and notable for their divided eyes which enables them to see both above and below water. They shone like platinum jewels on the surface of the water. Brilliant sight this!

After the wide *parikrama* of the *Gutta* we walked back to our transportation, very satisfied with the day's birding. Or should I say day's blessing?

The group at Keesara (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	23	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*
2	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	24	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	25	Indian Bushlark	*Plocealauda erythroptera*
4	Grey Francolin	*Ortygornis pondicerianus*	26	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
5	Painted Francolin	*Francolinus pictus*	27	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
6	Jungle/Rock Bush Quail	*Perdicula asiatica/argoondah*	28	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*
7	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*	29	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*
8	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	30	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
9	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	31	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
10	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	32	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*
11	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	33	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
12	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	34	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
13	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	35	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
14	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	36	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
15	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	37	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
16	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	38	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
17	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Ardea coromanda*	39	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
18	Shikra	*Tachyspiza badia*	40	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
19	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	41	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
20	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	42	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
21	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	43	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
22	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*			

Some other photographs taken during the trip:

Brown Rock Chat (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Frog Tadpole (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Pied Bushchat (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Shikra juvenile (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Yellow Ox-Eye *Buphthalmum salicifolium* (Photo: Gowthama Poludasu)

Plain Prinia (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Wild flower sp (Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

* * *

A BIRDER'S LULLABY: INDIA'S MIDNIGHT ORCHESTRA

Srikanth Bhamidipati

When the Night Refuses to Sleep

It is past midnight. The city sighs into silence. Streetlights spill their amber glow, dogs curl into quiet dreams, and even the breeze forgets to move.

And then slicing through stillness comes a cry: *"Brain-fever! Brain-fever! Brain-fever!"*

The Common Hawk Cuckoo has begun his aria. To the uninitiated, it is noise, maddening and insistent. But to those of us who watch birds, it is both familiar and oddly comforting, the call of summer nights, of restless passion, of seasons turning.

For a birder, this isn't disturbance. It's a lullaby, if a slightly mischievous one.

When Daytime Birds Dream Aloud

Most birds tuck into quiet roosts at dusk, but some carry their songs into the darkness. Why?

- Because love cannot tell time: Males sing even at midnight if their hormones demand it.
- Because the moon is a spotlight: Bright nights extend the stage.
- Because silence is a drum: With traffic gone, every note carries farther, echoing like ripples in water.

The night, for these singers, is not for rest. It is for auditions. And we, the sleepless listeners, become their unwilling judges.

The Indian Idol of the Night

Close your eyes, and the darkness turns into a stage. The moon is the chandelier. The *neem* tree is the mic stand. The whole neighbourhood is the audience.

And one by one, the contestants arrive.

The Hawk Cuckoo: The Drama King

He belts out *brain-fever!* with all the force of an Idol contestant convinced that volume equals victory. We, the jury, beg for mercy but he only grows louder, as though the stars themselves are his panel of judges.

The Grey-Bellied Cuckoo: The Repeater

His soft, plaintive *pee-pip-pip-pip* drifts through the air. Sweet at first, then endless. This is the contestant who sings one line again and again, until you wonder if the record is stuck. Yet there's tenderness in it, like a child repeating a lullaby to soothe himself.

The Indian Nightjar: The Scooter Beatboxer

His *chuk-chuk-chuk* is the percussion section half-scooter, half-snare drum. For some, it is irritation. For birders, it is the rhythm of the countryside, the background score of countless summer nights.

The Asian Koel: The Filmi Crooner

Ah, the koel. Romantic, filmi, forever rehearsing for a Bollywood soundtrack. In the soft hours of dawn, his *ku-oo* is honey. At 3:00AM, it is karaoke that forgot to end. Yet, what birder doesn't smile at his persistence?

The Peacock: The Drama Queen

With a piercing *may-awe!* the peacock enters, feathers hidden in the dark, voice echoing like a prince denied his throne. If there is an anthem for overacting, this is it. But oh, what joy to hear such royalty in the stillness of night.

The Barn Owl: The Horror Artist
Then comes the shriek: raw, chilling, unmistakable. For villagers, it is a ghost. For birders, it is simply *Tyto alba*, master of shadows. You listen, half laughing, half shuddering, as if the woods are whispering secrets too long kept from the sun.

The Greater Coucal: The Bassline
Coop-coop-coop, slowly, steadily, like the drumbeat that keeps the orchestra in sync. No drama, no fire, just a voice that grounds the night.

The Spotted Owlet: The Gossip Queen
And finally, the owlets chatter *Chee-wee-wee!* as though exchanging gossip under the banyan tree. Their chorus is playful, busy, endlessly curious. It feels less like music, more like a bedtime story told by children who refuse to sleep.

These nocturnal calls aren't just sounds; they are memories woven into India's cultural fabric:

- Farmers once waited for the Hawk Cuckoo to announce the rains.
- Poets gave the Koel to lovers, the Barn Owl to ghosts, the Peacock to gods.
- Naturalists like Salim Ali called the Hawk Cuckoo's cry "hysterical." Yet to birders, it is just summer's signature tune.

Each note is history, folklore, and biology rolled into one. To listen at night is to step into the same soundscape our grandparents once knew.

To a non-birder, these cries are chaos. But to us, they are a lullaby: not the gentle kind that rocks you to sleep, but the playful kind that keeps you awake with stories.

The Hawk Cuckoo is the hero who will not stop singing.

The Koel is the filmi lover who thinks every night is playback practice.

The Peacock is the diva, the Owl the ghost, the Owlet the gossiping cousin.

Together, they are not noise. They are the theatre of night.

When next you are woken at 2:00AM by a Hawk Cuckoo or a Koel, don't bury your head in the pillows. Step out. Look at the moon. Breathe. Listen as a birder does: with patience, with humour, with wonder.

Surrender to the rhythm of the Nightjar and the pleading cry of the Cuckoo, to the screeching Peacock and the shriek of an Owl. This is your lullaby: bizarre, ear-rending, hilarious, yet pulsingly alive.

And when you do fall unconscious, it will not be silence that holds you, but the ghosts of voices in the dark assuring you that the world is still awake, singing still, crammed with feathered tales.

At last, dawn arrives. The Koel softens. The Owlets return to their hollows. The Hawk Cuckoo, spent, bows out.

The orchestra hushes, the day-birds tune up their morning ragas.

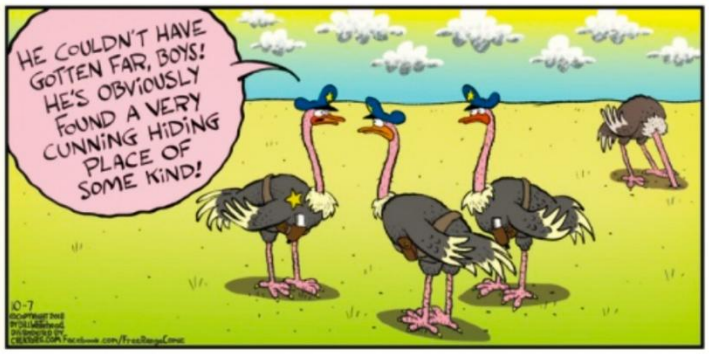
For the birder, it feels like leaving a late-night concert: tired, amused, filled with stories.

And you realise: this wasn't insomnia. It was a performance. A birder's lullaby.

* * *

Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From Facebook, March 15, 2024)

* * *

We wish all our members a very happy Deepawali 2025

Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*)

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (Dandeli, Karnataka, October 31, 2024)

Order:	Passeriformes
Family:	Sittidae
Genus:	*Sitta*
Species:	*S. frontalis*
Size:	10 cm
IUCN Status:	Least Concern

Description & distribution: The Velvet-fronted Nuthatch is a short-tailed bird with a relatively long, heavy pointed bill and strong feet. It is purplish blue above and greyish lilac below; it has a velvety, jet black forehead and lores, lavender cheeks and a whitish shin and throat. There is a prominent black superciliary stripe running above the eyes to the nape, which is lacking in the female. Bill and legs are bright red. Juvenile birds are duller versions of the adult, but without the black forehead.

Five subspecies are recognised. The nominate is *Sitta frontalis frontalis*, of the central Indian and south Indian hill forests, Western & Eastern Ghats, and Sri Lanka; this includes the Himalayan population (although Hodgson proposed the name *S. f. corallina* for them). Besides, there is *S. f. saturatior* of the Malay Peninsula, including Penang, Singapore and Sumatra; *S. f. velata* of Java; *S. f. corallipes* of Borneo and *S. f. palawana* of Palawan and Balabac in the western Philippines.

Habitat & behaviour: The Velvet-fronted Nuthatch is a resident breeder in many types of forests, from deciduous to evergreen mangrove forest, secondary forests, and even coffee plantations. It is quite a noisy bird, and easily located by its *sit-sit-sit* call. It has very strongly curved claws which enable it to work its way down vertical trees, unlike the woodpeckers that can only climb upwards. It moves jerkily up, down and around branches or trunks of trees, as it forages actively for spiders and other insects found under the bark of trees. It is usually seen in pairs or small groups, and also found quite often in mixed hunting parties.

Nesting: The Velvet-fronted Nuthatch breeds between February and April in South India, and between April and June in North India. The nest is usually a tree hollow lined with leaves, moss, feathers and grass, with the mouth walled up with mud plaster, leaving a small, round entrance. Old woodpecker and barbet holes are also commonly utilized. The clutch usually consists of 3-6 white eggs, heavily speckled and blotched red or purplish. Incubation is done mainly by the female, but both parents participate in feeding duties.

Local name: The Velvet-fronted Nuthatch is known as *'Tandan kili'* in Malayalam, *'Pasai edukira kuruvi'* (a bird that takes out gum/resin) in Tamil, *'Siri'* in Hindi, *'Makhmali siri'* (literally, velvety bird) in Marathi, and *'Makhmali zad-chad'* in Gujarati.

* * *